

# The Radical Evolution of Du Boisian Pan-Africanism

by

Anthony J. Ratcliff, Ph.D.

anthony.ratcliff@csun.edu

Assistant Professor, Department of Pan African Studies  
California State University, Northridge

## Abstract

Many scholars of Pan-Africanism acknowledge W.E.B. Du Bois as one of the movement's ideological progenitors. With his intellectual and organizational endeavors, he helped establish the Pan African Congress (PAC) in the early part of the 20th Century. However, while many accounts of Du Bois focus intently on his leadership of the PAC through the late 1920s, he remained actively involved in Pan African liberation movements up until the time of his death in 1963. This article examines the evolution of Du Boisian Pan-Africanism, focusing specifically on the role that the Fifth Pan-African Congress in 1945 and the subsequent independence of Ghana played in radicalizing his political and intellectual position on African unity. For, in addition to his commitment to exposing the racist and capitalist forces that oppressed Black people, the issue that dominated much of Du Bois's later scholarly and activist endeavors was his unwavering commitment to revolutionary Pan-Africanism.

Eight days prior to his ninety-five birthday Dr. William Edward Burghardt Du Bois, the preeminent African American scholar, became a naturalized citizen of Ghana. The fact that he suggested that his expatriation and the renunciation of his American citizenship carried “out the logic of [his] life,”<sup>1</sup> demonstrates the centrality of Pan-Africanism to Du Bois's evolving ontology. Moreover, in *Dusk of Dawn*, written in 1940, he elucidated why Africa was vitally important to the development of his identity:

“Since the concept of race has changed and presented so much of a contradiction that as I face Africa I ask myself: what is it between us that constitutes a tie which I can feel better than explain? Africa is of course my fatherland. Yet neither my father nor my father's father ever saw Africa or cared over-much for it. My mother's folk were closer and yet their direct connection, in culture and race, became tenuous; still, my tie to Africa is strong. On this vast continent were born and lived a large portion of my direct ancestors going back a thousand years or more.

But one thing is sure and that is the fact that since the fifteenth century these ancestors of mine and their other descendants have had a common history; have suffered a common disaster and have one long memory. The actual ties of heritage between the individuals of this group vary with the ancestors that they have in common and many others: Europeans and Semites, perhaps Mongolians, certainly Indians. But the physical bond is least and the badge of color relatively unimportant save as a badge; the real essence of kinship is its social heritage of slavery; the discrimination and insult; and this heritage binds together not simply the children of Africa, but extends through yellow Asian and into the South Seas. It is this unity that draws me to Africa.”<sup>2</sup>

By the 1940s, Du Bois clearly recognized the complexity of “race” and “color,” as well as the centrality of class, which led him to postulate a non-essentialist Pan-African framework predicated on socio-historical and economic factors, such as enslavement, discrimination, and ultimately Marxism-Leninism. In this article, therefore, I analyze the evolution of Du Boisian Pan-Africanism, specifically the role that the Fifth Pan-African Congress in 1945 and subsequent independence of Ghana played in radicalizing his political and intellectual position on African unity. In addition to his commitment to exposing the racist and capitalist forces that oppressed Black people, the issue that dominated much of Du Bois’s later scholarly and activist endeavors was his unwavering commitment to revolutionary Pan-Africanism.<sup>3</sup>

The confluence of Du Bois’s intellectual and political interests in African self-determination was initially sparked off during his involvement with the early Pan-African Congresses (1900-1927). Through the vehicles of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and its (“his”) journal, *The Crisis*, Du Bois helped organize the aforementioned PACs, as well as propagandize the plight of Africa and her descendants, which subsequently earned him the moniker “Father of Pan-Africanism.” While there are numerous studies that examined Du Bois’s role in the early PAC movement from 1919-1927, his participation in the Fifth Pan-African Congress in 1945 and beyond received minimal, if any, illumination.

To properly contextualize this study, however, it is imperative to begin with a brief discussion of Du Bois’s early commitment to the Pan-African Congress movement. Although Pan-Africanists such as George Padmore, T.R. Makonnen, and Kwame Nkrumah recognized him as the “Father” of Pan-Africanism, the usage of the term first occurred as early as 1893.<sup>4</sup> What is more, in 1900, Henry Sylvester Williams, a lawyer from Trinidad, organized the first Pan-African Conference in London. It was at this event that a thirty-two year old Du Bois addressed those convened with his most prophetic articulation:

“The problem of the twentieth century is the problem of the colour line, the question as to how far differences of race, which show themselves chiefly in the colour of the skin and the texture of the hair, are going to be made, hereafter, the basis of denying to over half the world the right of sharing to their utmost ability the opportunities and privileges of modern civilization.”<sup>5</sup>

Six years later, Du Bois restated this assertion: “The Negro problem in America is but a local phase of a world problem.”<sup>6</sup> In both instances, he observed the necessity of internationalizing the struggle for Black equality.

With the culmination of the First World War and the advent of the League of Nations in 1919, the potentiality for international solidarity amongst people of African descent intensified. In the United States, Du Bois competed with Marcus Garvey for control of this ascending Black internationalism. While Garvey’s Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA), with its mantra of “Africa for the Africans,” galvanized substantial support among the masses of African Americans. Du Bois developed an approach to Pan-Africanism that mobilized intellectual and political leadership (“The Talented Tenth”) from throughout the African *Diaspora*.<sup>7</sup> Between 1919 and 1927, he, with the financial support of the NAACP, organized Pan-African Congresses in Paris (1919); London, Paris, and Brussels (1921); London and Lisbon (1923); and, with the organizational leadership of Mrs. Addie Hunton and the National Association of Colored Women, in New York City (1927). While Du Bois planned a fifth PAC for 1929 in Tunis, the French colonial government thwarted his vision of convening a Congress in Africa. Despite the apparent shortcomings of focusing solely on elite people of African descent and seeking redress directly from Colonial governments, Du Bois nevertheless established Pan-Africanism as a legitimate political framework in which to address problems besieging Blacks worldwide.

By the early 1930s, the global economic depression led to a momentary diminution in the internationalism of many African Americans. It would take the Italian invasion of Ethiopia in 1935, to re-ignite the internationalist fervor amongst Black radicals, primarily those associated with the Communist Party.<sup>8</sup> For Du Bois, the focus inward was especially pronounced as he spent much of the early 1930s codifying his position on economic cooperatives and the desirability of Black self-determination (self-segregation), which ultimately led to his departure from the NAACP in 1934.

Despite the apparent respite in his Pan-Africanist proclivities during the 1930s, as a professor at Atlanta University, Du Bois continued to pen essays and articles on the importance of people from throughout the African diaspora recognizing the conflation of racism and economic exploitation. For example, in 1936, the doctor wrote an article in the *Pittsburgh Courier*, in which he correlated the issues of antiracism and anticolonialism. He asserted that only through Pan-African solidarity would people of African descent be able to counter the global system that oppressed them.

Unfortunately, argued Du Bois, most African Americans at that time were ambivalent about Pan-Africanism because they viewed their predicament as a question of attaining rights in the United States, rather than international liberation.<sup>9</sup> The following year, the doctor again wrote an article advocating Diasporic unity, which restated his position on Pan-Africanism. In it, he posited that Pan-Africanism “is a movement to begin a leadership of the exploited among the most exploited, with the idea of its ultimate expansion to the colored laboring class of the world and to the laboring class of all colors throughout the world.”<sup>10</sup> Despite now seeing the Black working class as having a role in Pan-Africanism, Du Bois still envisioned the PAC as a movement organized by an elite cadre of intellectuals that would ultimately liberate the oppressed masses.

In spite of the rather bourgeois predisposition inherent in his statement, when it came to propagating a Pan-Africanist worldview, Du Bois remained one of its foremost architects. This is further evidenced by his response to a press release issued by Rayford Logan in April 1941. Logan’s statement urged Black intellectuals to develop a program for people of African descent following World War II, to which Du Bois replied:

I agree with you and make the following proposal: suppose that in my capacity as Permanent Secretary of the Pan-African Congress, I announce through you a Fifth Pan-African Congress to be held in Port-au-Prince as soon as it is practical after the close of the present war with the understanding that such congress should immediately appoint delegates to wait upon the peace conference or any organization which is re-arranging the world to put before them the demands of the peoples of African descent. If you will look after this and work out a plan of the sort, I shall be very glad to sign it and ask you to act again as my chief assistant.<sup>11</sup>

Just as the First World War led to the formation of the League of Nations, Logan and Du Bois anticipated the establishment of another world institution to broker peace. In this, they believed, as did many other anti-colonialists at the time, that an international organization would be the best entity to ensure increased political rights for colonized peoples.

The idea for a fifth Pan-African Congress did not begin to gain international currency until 1944, however. Early that year, Du Bois received correspondences from Amy Jacques Garvey, the wife of Marcus Garvey, and, Harold Moody, president of the League of Coloured Peoples (LCP) in London, reiterating Logan’s idea of organizing an international conference on Africa. They both urged Du Bois “to help frame this *African Freedom Charter* for Africans at home and abroad.”<sup>12</sup> Mrs. Garvey’s letter dated April 5, 1944 is especially interesting for its laudatory tone, considering the caustic relationship that existed between Du Bois and her late husband:

“While we will draft our Memorandum, covering the abovementioned areas, and embodying the Six Freedoms:—Economically, educationally, socially, politically, spiritually and morally, I do want *you* to draft one too...Please send me a copy, which I will consider one of your greatest contributions to our people’s effort to rise in the might of their Manhood, and to provide for posterity equal opportunities with others.

Your experience, your calm, calculating judgment, your knowledge of international affairs, admirably fits you to send in a *one-man Memorandum*. I wish I knew Mdme Du Bois personally, I would try to get her busy, making you see what a fine opportunity presents itself, for you to serve, those whom you have, all your life served, but who as I explained in my previous letter, are so unmindful of real worth and service.

I know that Mdme Du Bois, has many a times been sacrificed on the alter of “*Service to the Race*,” but still, I feel sure, that she feels that an opportunity like this for *international Service*, may well be given to adorn and cap your long list of Services rendered freely and cheerfully. Thank you Professor, and don’t forget to autograph my copy.”<sup>13</sup>

Mrs. Garvey’s ability to transcend historic enmity and seek Du Bois’s participation in the African Freedom Charter attests to her important, although seemingly overlooked, role in helping to restart the postwar Pan-African movement. Immediately after receiving this correspondence, Du Bois issued a general call for the convening of a “Fifth Pan-African Congress to be held in London as soon after the war as possible.” The preliminary signers of the appeal were Mrs. Garvey; Harold Moody; Paul Robeson, Chairman of the Council on African Affairs (CAA); Max Yergan, Executive Director of the CAA; and Du Bois. Their call emphasized,

“No political changes in the relation between colonies and mother countries will necessarily be contemplated, except in cases where it is evident that no freedom of development is possible under present circumstances. Economic emancipation, a voice in government, education and the introduction of peoples of Negro descent into modern life will be the main object of this congress and of its ensuing activity.”<sup>14</sup>

One thing that is obvious about this statement is its rather conciliatory stance toward colonialism, which demonstrates Du Bois's and the other signers' interest in direct diplomacy with colonial governments of the time. In sharp contrast, when African and Caribbean trade unionists at the World Trade Union Conference in 1945 voted to convene a PAC following the conference, their demand was for self-determination and decolonization, rather than increased political rights. This point notwithstanding, Du Bois, Mrs. Garvey, and Moody should still receive credit for being the initial instigators of the Fifth Pan-African Congress.

In the midst of organizing the PAC, Du Bois was forced to retire from his professorship at Atlanta University. Although this initially came as a severe shock to the aged doctor, he soon received an offer to rejoin the NAACP as director of special research on Africa, which once again proffered him the intellectual and political space in which to agitate on behalf of Blacks throughout the Diaspora. From the outset of his return to the Association, however, Du Bois and Walter White, the head of the NAACP, remained in persistent contestation, specifically concerning international issues. Nevertheless, in early 1945, the doctor convinced the NAACP Board of Directors to establish a Pan-African Committee as well as "sponsor a call for a Fifth Pan African Congress, six months after the war with Germany is concluded." What is more, he envisioned this Congress being held somewhere in Africa. With the Association backing the PAC, Du Bois believed this increased the potentiality of a large Congress being convened.<sup>15</sup>

Unbeknownst to Du Bois, however, Africans and people of African descent in England, led by George Padmore, an ex-Communist from Trinidad, had issued a concurrent call for a Pan-African Congress to be held after the war. Once he learned of their proposal, Du Bois immediately expressed his interest in working with the Trinidadian and those "persons and organizations who have similar ideas."<sup>16</sup> Attempting to clarify the call, Padmore explained:

"I am delighted to hear that progress is being made in connection with the Pan African Conference at your end. But first a few words of clarification. Putting on one side the use of terms (Pan African was only employed because it epitomizes (sic) the conception behind the idea endorsed by Colonial Organizations in this country), there is no attempt to monopolise or by-pass the work of others engaged on a similar undertaking. We are well acquainted with the historical origin of the Pan-African Movement, especially me, as I am a nephew of the late Sylvester-Williams, a West Indian barrister who initiated the project with which you, Bishop Walters and others have been associated."<sup>17</sup>

His letter also stressed the importance of the NAACP utilizing the resources at its disposal to organize a New York Committee, which in turn would mobilize delegates from the US and West Indies. At the same time, members of the ad-hoc Pan African Federation (PAF) in Great Britain, consisting of Padmore's International African Service Bureau (IASB), the Negro Association (NA), the Negro Welfare Association (NWA), the West African Student Union (WASU) and delegates from the World Federation of Trade Unions (WFTU), would galvanize support from Blacks in Africa and Europe for the Congress.

Upon learning of the scheduled World Trade Union Conference in Paris that September, Du Bois sought the approval of French authorities to hold the PAC in Paris following the labor conference.<sup>18</sup> However, after returning to New York from the opening session of the United Nations in San Francisco in July 1945, his dream of assembling the Congress was in serious jeopardy, as the NAACP Board proposed changing the name of the event to the Dependent Peoples' Congress, against his bitter opposition. On August 1, 1945, Du Bois informed Jean de la Roche of the French Press and Information Service, "in all probability the Pan-African Congress will not be called in Paris this fall for two reasons:"

- (1) "The difficulty of being sure of return passage from France. All means of transportation are so crowded by American soldiers that delegates might be held up for months.
  - (2) There has developed in the Association some opposition to a Pan-African movement. They want to expand it into a Congress of Dependent Peoples. I do not agree with this at all, but the feeling is there.
- I have, therefore, given up the plan and I think the Association will not press it. I am very sorry indeed and appreciate your kind offer of cooperation."<sup>19</sup>

Although Du Bois believed the prospects of holding the PAC in Paris were bleak, two weeks later, the Pan-African Federation officially announced that the Fifth Pan-African Congress would begin on October 15 in England, one week after the World Trade Union Conference in Paris. In a clear ideological and strategic divergence from the earlier call issued by Du Bois, Mrs. Garvey, and Moody which sought economic, educational, and political improvements in the lives of colonized peoples, the Federation's call demanded outright independence.<sup>20</sup> The call for the Pan-African Congress gave a brief background of the movement, an agenda for the present Congress, and the objectives of the PAC: (1) To demand self-determination and independence of African people and other subject races from the domination of Powers claiming sovereignty and trusteeship over them. (2) To secure equality of Civil rights for African people and the total abolition of all forms of racial discrimination. (3) To promote the well-being and unity of African peoples and peoples of African descent throughout the world. (4) To strive for the co-operation between African peoples and other peoples who share their aspiration. Padmore further expressed this sentiment in a correspondence to Du Bois:

“Living under alien rule, their first manifestation of political consciousness naturally assumes the form of national liberation, self-determination, self-government—call it what you may. They want to be able to rule their own countries, free from the fetters of alien domination. On this all are agreed, from even the most conservative to the most radical elements. There might be differences as to the rate at which improvement is made towards the goal and regarding the political form, which the objective should take.”<sup>21</sup>

With Caribbean and African trade unionists, radical students, and African nationalists – notably Jomo Kenyatta of Kenya, Kwame Nkrumah of the Gold Coast (Ghana), Ja-Ja Wachuku and O. Awolowo of Nigeria – convening the Congress: Pan-Africanism had rapidly become a more representative and progressive movement.<sup>22</sup>

Despite being somewhat upstaged by the younger Padmore and the Pan-African Federation, Du Bois maintained his commitment to the Pan-African project. His attendance at Five PAC is even more impressive when one realizes that despite being 77 years of age, he was one of the few delegates to make the trip to Manchester from the United States.<sup>23</sup> The doctor’s lifelong dedication to Pan-Africanism was not disregarded, however, because on the final day of the meeting, delegates unanimously elected him International President of the Pan-African Congress. For Du Bois, the title “President of the PAC” was more than ceremonial. For example, after returning to the states, he utilized his position to galvanize African American support for and participation in the movement. One way in which Du Bois attempted to do this was by pressuring Walter White and the NAACP Board to “call a public meeting with regard to the Pan African Congress and American Negro aid.”<sup>24</sup> Unfortunately, the tenuous support the NAACP leadership had given to Pan-Africanism had all but dissipated by early 1946 and they never called this meeting. Nevertheless, he endeavored to organize a conference himself that would draw parallels between African liberation struggles and antiracism in the United States, with the intention of bringing the matter before the United Nations.<sup>25</sup>

Throughout 1946, Du Bois corresponded with numerous individuals and organizations in hopes of mobilizing a US-based Pan-African Movement. On July 24, “as President of the Pan African Congress,” he distributed a letter to the heads of various civil rights, religious, fraternal and African independence organizations “asking [them] to join [him] in seeking a way by which the people of Africa may be represented in the United Nations Assembly, at least as observers, if not participants.” To accomplish this, Du Bois suggested that a Pan-African committee be established that would prepare a petition concerning the African colonies for the General Assembly; chronicle “complaints and demands” from colonies over the previous one hundred years; and, enlist African signatories to draft a demand for the right to attend and discuss issues pertaining to African colonies at the Assembly.<sup>26</sup>



Although there is no record of the committee being formed, Du Bois nonetheless drafted a petition for presentation at the September 1946 meeting of the United Nations, which he sent to Trygve Lie, the secretary-general of the UN. Among the dozens of African American individuals and organizations that endorsed the petition were Mary McLeod Bethune, Adam Clayton Powell Jr., Max Yergan representing the National Negro Congress and Council on African Affairs, the Southern Negro Youth Congress, the presidents of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Kappa Alpha Psi Fraternity, Phi Beta Sigma Fraternity, Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, the National Baptist Convention, and the National Association of Colored Women. In addition, numerous trade unionists and nationalists from the Caribbean and Africa supported the petition, such as Nnamdi Azikiwe, Jomo Kenyatta, Ras Has Immru of Ethiopia, Wallace Johnson of Sierra Leone, and George Padmore, to name a few.<sup>27</sup>

Conspicuously absent from signing the Pan-African Congress petition, however, were Walter White and the NAACP Board. At the same time, they did give immediate technical and financial support to Du Bois's idea of drafting "a petition to the Assembly of the United Nations when it meets in September, touching the situation of American Negroes."<sup>28</sup> Even though he worked tirelessly preparing both petitions, Du Bois nevertheless expressed his frustration with White and the NAACP due to their growing cautiousness on international issues. In a December 2, 1946 memo to White, he exclaimed:

"Ever since my preliminary report on the work of this department made in 1944, I have stressed in nearly every report to the board certain actions which we ought to take toward Africa. To this the board has paid no attention except in the case of my visiting the Pan African Congress.

In its relations to Africa and the social problems there, this organization is facing a problem similar to that of the whole United States, in the question of the relation of this country to other countries of the world. The unrest and agitation and development in Africa especially during the last twenty-five years is moving toward a crescendo. Never before in the history of the world has there been such evidence of movement on the part of so many people of the African continent (to join hands and liberate themselves). This organization is, of course, at liberty entirely to ignore this by maintaining that our problems have to do with the United States and that there we have more than enough to keep us busy and to use our available funds; and that we should leave the problems of Africa to some other organization. However, there is no organization taking up this work as it should be preformed."<sup>29</sup>

The primary cause of the Association's deepening conservatism was the onslaught of the Cold War between the United States and Soviet Union. Even though the national leadership of the NAACP was never revolutionary, between the late 1930s and mid-1940s, many of its spokespeople were involved in progressive causes, from union solidarity with the ascendancy of the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO) to anticolonial struggles. In the immediate postwar period, however, the US government became increasingly sure that Communists were behind any and all challenges to its domestic and international activities.<sup>30</sup> Therefore, liberal organizations, such as the NAACP leadership, worked diligently to rid themselves of the "red" tinge by muting their critiques of US foreign policy.

For Du Bois, though, the retreat from anticolonialism and Pan-Africanism were unconscionable. What is more, he increasingly envisioned the primary threat to true African independence as the rising tide of economic imperialism and war mongering propagated by the United States. In June 1946, at a rally against imperialism organized by the Council on African Affairs, Du Bois stated:

"May I bring to this meeting personally and in behalf of the Pan African Congress which I represent, my greetings and congratulation on your interest in Africa and its crying needs. I have given long thought and study to Africa and its problems. I am convinced the whole colonial system built on the slavetrade and American slavery, has been the main cause of the exploitation of the working classes in Europe, Asia and America. This exploitation has been the recurrent and persistent cause of war and war has caused the present critical collapse of civilization. If the world wants peace, it must abolish the colonial system, and this abolition must start in Africa. African colonialism, even more than Asiatic, and even more than American, lies at the bottom of the modern woes of labor the world over. I am glad, therefore, that you have taken note of the physical hunger in Africa today. I trust you will continue your efforts and include help for the social and political degradation of the land where human civilization was born."<sup>31</sup>

By highlighting the corollary between colonialism and war, Du Bois was simply restating a point he made thirty-one years previously in the article, "The African Roots of War." At the same time, the potentiality of global destruction was even more salient with the advent of the Cold War.

This corollary is further borne out in his 1947 text, *The World and Africa*. Although Du Bois had written two previous books exploring Africa's rich yet often obscured history: *The Negro* (1915) and *Black Folk Then and Now* (1939), by writing *The World and Africa* from a historical materialist perspective, he ends up with an entirely different interpretation of Africa's centrality to world history.<sup>32</sup>

For example, the first three chapters of the text: “The Collapse of Europe,” “The White Masters of the World,” and “The Rape of Africa,” serve as clear indictments of Western capitalism’s role in destabilizing Africa economically, socially, and politically. He also builds upon Eric William’s historic study, *Capitalism and Slavery* (1944), by demonstrating how the “triangular trade” between Africa, the Americas, and Europe “provided one of the main streams of...capital which financed the Industrial Revolution.”<sup>33</sup> In Chapter 11, the most powerful chapter of his text, Du Bois employs the Greek myth of Andromeda, “the black daughter of Cepheus, King of Ethiopia and Cassiopeia,” as a metaphor for Africa. The myth tells of how the Greek god Poseidon was jealous of Andromeda’s beauty and threatened to flood the land, which only her sacrifice could thwart. Before Poseidon’s sea monster had the opportunity to kill Andromeda, however, Perseus miraculously rescues her and upon their deaths, the two of them reigned among the stars. In applying this metaphor to Africa, Du Bois asserted that through colonialism and war, Europe had sacrificed Africa’s development for its own capitalist accumulation. He was convinced that as long as the West objectified African and exploited her resources, than the world would remain in perpetual doom. “Peace and tolerance is the only path to eternal progress,” argued Du Bois. “Europe can never survive without Asia and Africa as free and interrelated civilizations in one world.”<sup>34</sup> Du Bois contended that the best methodology to realize the emancipation of Africa was through the continued propagation of a Pan-African project.

Unfortunately, for Du Bois, by the time he published *The World and Africa*, the NAACP Board and Walter White had completely distanced themselves from Pan-Africanism. One of the only organizations in the United States that maintained its solidarity with Africa and other oppressed people during the ascendancy of Cold War hysteria was the Council on African Affairs (CAA). Organized by Paul Robeson and Max Yergan in 1937, in response to the Italian invasion of Ethiopia, the CAA worked primarily on issues affecting South Africa, especially against apartheid. Although it remained relatively small throughout its existence, the Council was able to mobilize mass rallies, as was the case of the over 15,000 people who attended the Rally against Imperialism at Madison Square Garden in 1946. Nonetheless, at its annual meeting in January 1947, the CAA voted to increase its membership from 29 to 100 and Du Bois was one of the individuals chosen to join its ranks. The invitation from Robeson and Yergan to Du Bois stated: “Because of your interest in the colonial question and in the welfare of the African people you are among those whose membership on the Council is very much interested. We write to advise you of the Council’s action in nominating you, and to express the hope that you will accept our invitation.” The correspondence then went on to illuminate the various activities the CAA had been involved in during the previous year:

“Undoubtedly, we are now entering upon a period within which there is the possibility that the entire colonial system may be shaken to its foundation. Indeed, this immediate period can see the complete removal of the colonial system. Events are moving fast in India, Indonesia, and the West Indies and, we are glad to tell you, in the continent of African also. Moreover, the advent of the United Nations Assembly, despite its limitations, offers a new channel through which the American people can play a more effective and progressive part in the world tasks which are unavoidable. It is for these reasons that our organization has made changes in its structure and now proposes to enter a program which will reflect greater effectiveness in our work...”<sup>35</sup>

Du Bois eventually accepted membership in the CAA and upon being purged from the NAACP<sup>36</sup> became its Vice-Chairman. A persistent criticism of the Council, however, had been the presence of well-known Communist functionaries within its membership and the alleged close relationship it had with the Communist Party. By late 1947, this contention led US Attorney General Tom Clark, to place the CAA on the government’s list of subversive organizations. Not long after this occurred, Yergan, who previously had close ties with Communists, attempted to repudiate his former comrades by releasing slanderous remarks to the press. As a consequence, a bifurcation developed in the Council between Yergan supporters, who represented an anti-Communist faction and Robeson, Du Bois, and Alpheus Hunton supporters who opposed purging any members due to party affiliation.<sup>37</sup> The issue was finally resolved after a series of meetings in May 1948, when the Council’s Executive Board voted to remove Yergan as Executive Director for frustrating the aims of the CAA, financial malfeasance, failing to carry out decisions reached by membership, and distorting the image of the organization in the press.<sup>38</sup>

In spite of the internal turmoil that nearly destroyed the Council, Du Bois remained an active functionary throughout its tenuous existence.<sup>39</sup> A primary reasoning for this, I contend, lies in the Council’s restatement of purpose issued May 1948:

“Current happenings of great importance in Africa demand that the Council’s total failure to address itself to these events for almost four months be immediately ended. There is no other organization in the United States focusing public attention upon the wanton imperialistic exploitation currently practiced in Africa. There is no other organization working to make Americans conscious of why and how they must ally themselves with the African people in order to win the common goals of democracy, security, and peace.”<sup>40</sup>

Clearly, the political Right’s consistent red-baiting and anti-communist haranguing of the CAA could not deter Du Bois’s dedication to African liberation, which to him was integral to world peace.

By the early 1950s, Du Bois, who married Shirley Graham in 1951, found himself completely ensnared by the “Red Scare” and domestic anti-communism. Although he was not “officially” a member of the Communist Party (at this time), his close affiliation led him to be indicted on charges of being an “unregistered foreign agent” and lose his passport between 1951 and 1958. As a result, Du Bois and Shirley were unable to attend Ghana’s independence celebration in 1957, which deeply saddened the aged doctor.<sup>41</sup> Nonetheless, despite the political repression that Du Bois endured, he continued to be a devoted Pan-Africanist. For instance, in 1955, he wrote an article in the *National Guardian* lamenting “the breaking of ties between Africa and American Negroes.” A decade earlier, though, Black internationalism had been at its efflorescence, as organizations from the leftist CAA to the centrist NAACP maintained consistently progressive positions on self-determination for Africans and other colonized peoples. Paradoxically, by the mid-1950s, Du Bois argued that Black Americans were trading “equal status [in America]...for the slavery of the majority of men.”<sup>42</sup>

As his commitment to Pan-African liberation and peace intensified, Du Bois became even more convinced that international socialism – modeled after China – was the only economic system that would benefit the masses of African people throughout the globe.<sup>43</sup> Unfortunately, however, due to illness, Du Bois was again unable to travel to Ghana in 1958 to attend the All-African People’s Conference, organized by Kwame Nkrumah and his advisor George Padmore. Nevertheless, Shirley Du Bois attended and read the doctor’s address “The Future of Africa” in which he admonished Africans to choose the path of socialism. His speech asserted that “[Capitalism] offers to let some of your smarter and less scrupulous leaders become fellow capitalists with the white exploiters if in turn they induce the nation’s masses to pay the awful costs...A body of local private capitalists, even if they are black, can never free Africa; they will simply sell it into new slavery to old masters overseas.”<sup>44</sup> This class analysis of African liberation, which Du Bois returned to again and again in speeches for the remainder of his life, undoubtedly anticipated and influenced the work of radical Pan-Africanists from the Marxist Walter Rodney to the Kwame Ture, who supported African Socialism.<sup>45</sup>

However, the years of struggling against US racism, imperialism, political repression, and militarism had finally become too great for Du Bois. In 1961, at the age of 93, he and Shirley immigrated to Accra, Ghana, at the request of Nkrumah, where he assumed the directorship of the *Encyclopedia Africana*.<sup>46</sup> In an explanation of this action, Du Bois asserted: “I am sure you understand that this decision on my part carries out the logic of my life and all my efforts. My great-grandfather was carried away in chains from the Gulf of Guinea. I have returned that my dust shall mingle with the dust of my forefathers.”<sup>47</sup> Thus, not only had engaging the discourse on Africa and Pan-Africanism been significant to his scholarly and political enterprise, but ultimately, it engendered his decision to expatriate to Ghana where he died on August 27, 1963.

It may be argued that Du Bois's decision to relocate to Africa has never been a viable option or goal for the vast majority of Blacks in the United States; nonetheless, we should applaud his dedication to the liberation of people of African descent. In addition to developing an anti-racist and anti-capitalist form of Pan-Africanism that envisioned the emancipation of all people of color, he sacrificed his career and freedom by refusing to repudiate his radical internationalist proclivities. Sadly, most studies of the Pan-Africanist project of Du Bois fail to fully examine his involvement beyond the Fifth Pan-African Congress. I believe, however, that his analysis of the issues affecting Africa and people of African descent in the Diaspora was far superior following Five PAC. Furthermore, at a time when most other Black intellectuals had silenced their critiques of American capitalism and imperialism, Du Bois raised the level of his condemnation. While activists and scholars during the 1960s, 70s, and 80s – from Walter Rodney to the Institute for the Black World – built upon Du Bois's radical Pan-Africanist legacy, since the end of the anti-apartheid movement, interest in Black internationalism has waned.<sup>48</sup> This is truly unfortunate given the onslaught of hyper-capitalism and the consolidation of reactionary regimes throughout the globe (especially in the US), as well as the continued deplorable condition that Black people find themselves in. It is imperative, therefore, that progressive people of African descent revisit Du Boisian Pan-Africanism for its transgressive and transformative potentialities.

## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> Du Bois to Nnamdi Azikiwe, March 15, 1963, W.E.B. Du Bois Papers.

<sup>2</sup> W.E.B. Du Bois, *Dusk of Dawn: An Essay Towards an Autobiography of a Race Concept*, (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1940).

<sup>33</sup> Walter Rucker, "A Negro Nation within the Nation:" W.E.B. Du Bois and the Creation of a Revolutionary Pan-Africanist Tradition, 1903-1947," *Black Scholar* 2002 32(3-4): 37-46.

<sup>4</sup> Ronald Walters asserts that the first usage of the term "Pan African Conference" occurred in 1893, by an African American newspaper in Chicago called *Advance*. See, *Pan Africanism in the African Diaspora: An Analysis of Modern Afrocentric Political Movements*, (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1993): p. 52.

<sup>5</sup> W.E.B. Du Bois, "To the Nations of the World," *Report of the Pan-African Conference, held on the 23<sup>rd</sup>, 24<sup>th</sup>, and 25<sup>th</sup> July, 1900 at Westminster Town Hall, Westminster, S.W.* [London]. Headquarters 61 and 62, Chancery Lane, W.C., London, England [1900], p. 10.

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<sup>6</sup> Du Bois, "The Color Line Belts the World," *Collier's Weekly*, October 20, 1906, p. 30.

<sup>7</sup> There are many divergent meanings of the term "African Diaspora." Thus, for the purposes of this paper, I'm applying Brent Hayes Edwards formulation. He argues that "diaspora points to difference not only internally (the ways transnational black groupings are fractured by nation, class, gender, sexuality, and language) but also externally: in appropriating a term so closely associated with Jewish thought, we are forced to think not in terms of some closed or autonomous system of African dispersal but explicitly in terms of a complex past of forced migrations and racializations – what Earl Lewis has called a history of 'overlapping diasporas'" (pp. 12-13). In *The Practice of Diaspora: Literature, Translation, and the Rise of Black Internationalism*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003).

<sup>8</sup> As Italy made threatening overtures toward Ethiopia, the CP organized the American League Against War and Fascism (ALAWF). In September 1935, the ALAWF held a rally in Harlem entitled "Hands off Ethiopia" in which 9,000 people attended. Walter White and W.E.B. Du Bois were speakers at the rally. On the heels of Italy's invasion of Ethiopia in October 1935, the League held the "People's March for Peace" supported by over 15,000 people. See, Mark Naison, *The Communist Party in Harlem, 1928-1936*, (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1986): pp. 174-175. In addition, beginning in 1936, Du Bois had a regular column in the *Pittsburgh Courier* in which he quite frequently discussed the Italian invasion of Ethiopia. For specific articles on the issue see: 8 February 1936, 2 May 1936, 16 May 1936, 23 May 1936, and 6 June 1936.

<sup>9</sup> Du Bois, "A Forum of Fact and Opinion," *Pittsburgh Courier*, 25 April 1936.

<sup>10</sup> Du Bois, "A Forum of Fact and Opinion," *Pittsburgh Courier*, 5 June 1937.

<sup>11</sup> Du Bois to Rayford Logan, April 19, 1941, Du Bois Papers.

<sup>12</sup> In this letter Amy Garvey also wrote: "Why should I above all people, write to you as I do? Because personal feelings must be forgotten in the Unity of effort that is being forged for Africa, and our people." See, Amy Jacques Garvey to Du Bois, January 31, 1944; On February 9, 1944, Du Bois replied that he would "be glad to cooperate with him [Moody] or you in any way possible." See, Du Bois to Garvey, February 9, 1944 and Du Bois to Harold Moody, February 9, 1944, all in Du Bois Papers.

<sup>13</sup> Amy Jacques Garvey to Du Bois, April 5, 1944, Du Bois Papers.

<sup>14</sup> Du Bois to Amy Garvey, April 8, 1944, Du Bois Papers.

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<sup>15</sup> Du Bois to Harold Moody, February 15, 1944, Du Bois Papers.

<sup>16</sup> The *Chicago Defender* printed Padmore's call for a PAC in its March 17, 1945 newspaper. Du Bois to George Padmore, March 22, 1945, Du Bois Papers.

<sup>17</sup> Padmore to Du Bois, April 12, 1945, Du Bois Papers.

<sup>18</sup> On April 11, 1945, Du Bois wrote Jean de la Roche of the French Press and Information Service in New York about the possibility of holding the PAC in Paris. "I am anxious to have a meeting of the Pan African Congress in Paris [the] same month [as the WTUC]... My idea is that following the liberal program of M. de Gaulle and the late Governor Eboue, French would represent the most encouraging prospect of a solution for the problems of colonies and the development of black folk in the modern world." de la Roche agreed with Du Bois about Paris being the ideal location for holding PAC. In June, Du Bois received approval of his request. See, Du Bois to Jean de la Roche, April 11, 1945; de la Roche to Du Bois, April 13, 1945; de la Roche to Du Bois, June 1, 1945, all in Du Bois Papers.

<sup>19</sup> Du Bois to de la Roche, August 1, 1945, Du Bois Papers.

<sup>20</sup> See, Pan-African Congress Press Release No. 4, October 1945, in Du Bois Papers.

<sup>21</sup> Padmore to Du Bois, August 17, 1945, Du Bois Papers.

<sup>22</sup> Further demonstrating the progressive tendencies of this Congress was its adoption of a resolution on Indo-China:

"The Pan African Congress comprising of peoples of Africa and African descent now in Session in the City of Manchester, extends its fraternal greetings to the struggling peoples of Java and Indo-China in their fight against Dutch and French Imperialism, and pledges its solidarity in their struggle for freedom. HANDS OFF JAVA! HANDS OFF INDO-CHINA!" Many of those involved with the Fifth PAC would go on to attend the Bandung Conference in 1955, which established the "Non-align Movement." For the PAC resolution, see *Messages Sent to the Pan-African Congress*, "Resolution on Indo-China," October 15, 1945, in Du Bois Papers.



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<sup>23</sup> In an unpublished article written by Du Bois while at the Congress, October 16, 1945, he recognized the competing political tendencies at Five PAC. On the one hand, he noted, there was:

Self criticism warning against inner class conflict; urging to sacrifice as the beginning of reform. The other, and the stronger, a demand, sometimes arising to bitterness for Self Government and even Independence. The basis of these demands were an exposition of Colonial conditions that has astonished people who know something of what Colonies mean. It was emphasized for instance, that in West Africa under the Controls of War Administration, Ginger, which used to sell at 25 pounds a ton, and then in war-time rose to 100 pounds, was bought from the Black farmers, under compulsion, at 11 pounds and 30 pounds. Representatives of 300,000 farmers of the Gold Coast complained bitterly of the refusal of the new Colonial Secretary of the Labour Government to listen to any change at present in the Economic Controls now in use. Each speaker emphasized the poverty of West Africa, -- grinding poverty. They told of families receiving an average of 5 pounds a year for their work and skilled labour at 2/- a day.

<sup>24</sup> Du Bois to Padmore, January 28, 1946, Du Bois Papers.

<sup>25</sup> In a correspondence to Padmore, Du Bois addressed the intransigence of Walter White and the NAACP Board regarding Pan-Africanism. He asserted, "Ever since I returned I have been trying to get the NAACP to sponsor a public meeting by which these cooperating organizations could be brought in to join us in an American Pan-African Movement so as to help the parent body. Although I have appealed to the Board and the Secretary, I have not been able to accomplish anything. I did not want to start out on a movement of this sort on my personal initiative, as it might involve a certain disloyalty to the NAACP which I do not want to appear to promote." See, Du Bois to Padmore, July 12, 1946, Du Bois Papers.

<sup>26</sup> The organizations that Du Bois addressed this letter to were the NAACP, Council on African Affairs, the African Academy of Arts and Research, the Federation of Negro Churches, the National Council of Negro Women, the Odd Fellows, Elks, Prince Hall Masons, the Nigerian Youth Council, the National Council of British West Africa, the Native Congress of South Africa, the Native Congress of East Africa, the Federated Trades Unions of the West Indies, and the Governments of Ethiopia, Haiti, and Liberia. See, Du Bois to Oswald Garrison Villard, July 24, 1946, Du Bois Papers.

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<sup>27</sup> See, Du Bois to Trygve Lie, September 4, 1946, Du Bois Papers.

<sup>28</sup> See, Memorandum to Walter White from Du Bois, August 1, 1946. White responded on the same day: “I think it is of the highest importance that we should file a petition to the United Nations and it should be given the widest possible publicity and circulation. I would to know what the expenses would be for clerical help. If you will let me have that, I will take it up immediately.” See, Memorandum to Dr. Du Bois from Walter White, August 1, 1946, both in Du Bois Papers. The ninety-four page petition entitled: *An Appeal to the World: A Statement on the Denial of Human Rights to Minorities in the Case of Citizens of Negro Descent in the United States of America and an Appeal to the United Nations for Redress*, was released in 1947.

<sup>29</sup> Memorandum to the Secretary on Africa, December 2, 1946, Du Bois Papers.

<sup>30</sup> On March 5, 1946, in Fulton, Missouri, former British Prime Minister Winston Churchill proclaimed that an “Iron Curtain” covered Eastern Europe and warned of further Communist expansionism in China and Greece. The following year, the administration of Harry Truman adopted a containment policy and issued the Truman Doctrine, promising to oppose Communist expansion wherever it might be attempted. Anti-Communist hysteria soon dominated America’s political and social topography. For example, the House Committee on Un-American Activities (HUAC) and the Federal Bureau of Investigations (FBI) intensified their interrogations of suspected leftists, while the U.S. Attorney General issued a list of allegedly subversive organizations. In addition, politicians – of whom Senator Joseph McCarthy was the most fanatical – became obsessed with exposing a purportedly vast Communist conspiracy.

<sup>31</sup> From W.E.B. Du Bois, “Speech at the Council on African Affairs Rally,” Madison Square Gardens, New York City, June 6, 1946, in Du Bois Papers.

<sup>32</sup> In a previous text of his, *Black Reconstruction* (1936), Du Bois also applied a Marxist analysis to examine the role that African Americans played during Reconstruction. In the preface of *The World and Africa* he asserts, “I have also made bold to repeat the testimony of Karl Marx, whom I regard as the greatest modern philosopher, and I have not been deterred by the witch-hunting which always follows mention of his name.” Du Bois, *The World and Africa: An Inquiry into the Part which Africa has Played in World History*, (New York: International Publishers, 1946, 1947): p. ix.

<sup>33</sup> Du Bois, *The World and Africa*, p. 58.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid*, p. 259.

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<sup>35</sup> Paul Robeson and Max Yergan to Du Bois, January 1947, in Du Bois Papers.

<sup>36</sup> Because Du Bois avidly supported Henry A. Wallace for President in 1948 due to his progressive stances on anticolonialism and world peace, he publicly challenging the NAACP leaderships' resolve on international affairs. This action ultimately led to his ouster from the Association. In his acerbic letter to the Board, he exclaimed:

I deny the right of any [NAACP] official to tie this organization to the foreign policy of the present administration as long as it stands against the public discussion of our civil rights, for the despoiling of Ethiopia, for the delaying of recognition to Israel, and, in general, against the interests of colonial peoples.

The statement concluded by demanding that the Board of Directors establish a clear and progressive foreign policy. Paradoxically, White and the NAACP Board had invited Du Bois back to the organization in 1944, precisely because of his internationalist propensities; however, the necessity to remain in the good graces of the Truman administration, as it moved rightward, predicated their repudiation of the doctor. See, Du Bois to the Secretary and Board of Directors of the NAACP, September 7, 1948.

<sup>37</sup> In addition to the Attorney General's labeling of the CAA as subversive, Yergan was threatened by Robeson's close ties to Henry A. Wallace and the Progressive Party. The slanderous articles released by Yergan stated that Robeson and others in the Council were utilizing organizational resources for Wallace's campaign, which was wholly unsubstantiated. See, W.A. Hunton to Du Bois, April 1, 1948; and Postscript of Newspaper Articles, Undated, both in Du Bois Papers.

<sup>38</sup> See, Charges Against the Executive Director, May 15, 1948; and, Resolution of the Executive Board on the Case of Dr. Max Yergan, May 26, 1948, both in Du Bois Papers.

<sup>39</sup> In 1953, the CAA was brought before the Subversive Activities Control Board and charged under the Foreign Agents Registration Act. These charges would ultimately discredit the Council and eventually lead to its demise in 1955. See, "Status of the Council's Case before the Subversive Activities Control Board," December 17, 1953; "Petitioner's Motion to Strike Certain Allegations in the Respondent's Answer to the First Amendment Petition," SACB, Department of Justice, undated; "Prosecution Threatened for Aid to Africans," *Spotlight on Africa*, 16 October 1954, all in Du Bois Papers.

<sup>40</sup> Robeson to Du Bois, May 26, 1948, in Du Bois Papers.

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<sup>41</sup> Du Bois responded to Nkrumah's invitation: "I have your kind invitation of January 22, 1957. In behalf of myself and of my wife, Shirley Graham, I thank you for it and want to say how great is our desire to accept it. But because of the difficulty of obtaining passports and the cost of travel, we must with deep regret inform you of our inability to accept." Du Bois to Nkrumah, February 7, 1957, in Du Bois papers.

<sup>42</sup> Du Bois, "American Negroes and Africa," *National Guardian*, February 14, 1955. As it appeared that most African Americans were distancing themselves from internationalism, the Bandung Conference in April 1955 signified the confluence of African and Asian anti-colonial movements and their desire to self-determination, which impressed the aged doctor.

<sup>43</sup> In 1959, on the occasion of his 91<sup>st</sup> birthday, Du Bois addressed over 1,000 students and teachers at Peking University in China where he suggested that burgeoning African nations should look to China as a model for "colored" people's self-determination. See Du Bois, "China and Africa," *New World Review*, April 1959. His embrace of Marxism-Leninism eventually led him to join the Communist Party in 1961.

<sup>44</sup> Du Bois, "The Future of Africa," Address to the All-African People's Conference, Accra, *National Guardian*, 22 December 1958.

<sup>45</sup> See, Rupert Lewis, *Walter Rodney's Intellectual and Political Thought*, (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1998).

<sup>46</sup> Du Bois originally envisioned the project in 1909, "A Statement Concerning the Encyclopaedia Africana Project," *Encyclopedia Africana Project: A Pan-African Dream Come True*, 1 April 1962.

<sup>47</sup> Du Bois to Nnamdi Azikiwe, March 15, 1963, in Du Bois Papers.

<sup>48</sup> Even before South African Apartheid fell, major damage had been wrought on the US Pan-Africanist movement because of internal ideological differences. The main split came in the 1970s between proponents of Marxism-Leninism and Cultural Nationalists. See, *Black Scholar*, 1974.